Cummins, Hazlewood and David in spin-heavy Australia squad for T20 World Cup

MELBOURNE: Australia named injured fast bowlers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood and big-hitter Tim David in their provisional squad for the Twenty20 World Cup in February-March, while expanding their spin options to suit conditions in Sri Lanka and India.

Cummins, who has not played an international game in the short format since June 2024, was rested from the final two Ashes games against England to manage his back issues, only playing in the third Test in the series.

The pacer will undergo final scans later in the month to determine his participation in the World Cup beginning on February 7, Cricket Australia said. The teams have until January 31 to name their final squads.

Hazlewood was ruled out of the entire Ashes series with an injury in the Achilles' region while recovering from a hamstring strain, while David picked up a fresh hamstring injury in the Big Bash League (BBL) on Boxing Day.

"Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Tim David are tracking well and we are confident they will be available for the World Cup," Australian chair of selectors George Bailey said.

Australia also handed surprise call-ups to left-armer spinners Matt Kuhnemann and Cooper Connolly, who have just one T20 wicket between them.

They join experienced leg-spinner Adam Zampa, with Glenn Maxwell and Matthew Short offering additional spin support.

"This is a preliminary squad so should changes need to be made they will be made ahead of the support period," Bailey said.

Connolly has been in sublime form with the bat in the BBL this year with 170 runs in four games at a strike rate of 166.

Australia, who will be playing their group games in Sri Lanka with the expectation of spin-friendly surfaces, will be led by Mitchell Marsh as captain, and will kick off their World Cup campaign against Ireland on February 11.

In a surprise, Australia opted against a back-up wicketkeeper for Josh Inglis and no left-arm pace replacement for Mitchell Starc, who has retired from the 20-over game.

The fast-bowling attack is led by Cummins and Hazlewood, along with Nathan Ellis and Xavier Bartlett, plus all-rounders Cameron Green and Marcus Stoinis. All are right-handers.

"The T20 side has enjoyed a long run of recent success which enabled the panel to choose a balance of players across the variety of conditions Sri Lanka and India may present," Bailey added.

Australia will name a separate squad for a T20 series against Pakistan that precedes the World Cup.

Squad: Mitchell Marsh (captain), Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Short, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa. —Agencies

Revised PSL governing council puts Mohsin in strong position

By Mohammad Yaqoob

LAHORE: The revised governing council of the Pakistan Super League, made after an agreement was signed between the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and PSL franchises, has given PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi significant powers to take decisions.

According to the agreement signed between the PCB and the PSL franchisees recently, a copy of which is available with *Dawn*, nine members of the former (PCB) and eight of the latter (franchises) are members of the governing council. So, in terms of voting for decision-making, the position of the PCB looks strong.

The agreement made between the PCB and franchises says: "A revised PSL governing council has been formed that is headed by the PCB chairman. It will be a consultative body which will work towards a common goal of growing and improving the PSL. The PCB chairman will have all decision-making power over the PSL in respect of any and all decisions.

"The PCB representatives on this PSL governing council will be responsible for providing the PSL team with expert support as required in their expertise area.

"The governing council will, at its discretion, take decisions from time to time regarding arrangements (including who will bear costs) in respect of grounds and umpires for PSL Tournaments," the agreement reads.

The nine PCB officials who are part of the PSL include its PSL chief executive, PCB chief operating officer, PCB chief financial officer, PSL director, PCB commercial director, senior general manager finance and accounts, PSL senior manager, director media and communications, and one representative from each franchisee.

In PSL 2026, the PCB will have a 9-7 majority because it has decided to own Multan Sultans which were not presented for sale by the PCB, after its previous owner, Ali Tareen, did not purchase it.

PCB's decision of owning Multan Sultans will deprive the Board of the franchise's annual fee, which is around Rs1.08 billion. Moreover, significant spending will have to be made on Multan Sultans' players, coaching staff, their accommodation and travel, making it difficult for the PCB to make profit from the franchise.

On the other hand, the remaining five owners retained their respective franchises.

Two new franchises — to be selected from among six cities on Jan 8 — are being sold which will make PSL an eight-team contest from its 11th edition starting in March.

YANBU (Saudi Arabia): The Dacia Sandriders' Sebastian Loeb of France in action during a training session ahead of the Dakar Rally on Thursday. The rally returns to Saudi Arabia for a seventh consecutive year, with the event scheduled from Jan 3 to 17 and featuring over 800 competitors from 69 countries in 433 vehicles.—Reuters

Set to boost running culture, Karachi Marathon returns with growing participation

By Mir Shabbar Ali

KARACHI: As the sun dipped into the waters off Karachi's Seaview on a chilly Thursday evening, a festive air settled over AK Khan Park along the promenade.

Men and women of all ages, with children alongside, gradually filled the park. Patiently queuing at counters marked in vibrant black and turquoise branding, they collected what would soon become keepsakes: running bibs for the 2026 Karachi Marathon.

On Sunday, with these bibs — fitted with time-tracking chips — pinned to their running gear, participants will line up at the promenade near Nishan-i-Pakistan Park.

Runners competing in the full and half marathon categories will begin before sunrise at 6:30am, while those taking part in the five-kilometre race (commonly referred to as the 5K) will start at 9:00am.

More than 2,000 runners have registered for the marathon events. Registrations for the 5K, meanwhile, remain open, with over 3,000 participants already signed up.

This will be the third edition of the Karachi Marathon, which is recognised by World Athletics and has its distance professionally certified by the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS).

Shaheer, an 18-year-old student at NED University, first experienced competitive running when he participated in the 5K at last year's event. This year, he is stepping up to the half marathon.

"I love playing sports — I play basketball quite regularly — but running has a different feeling to it, a feeling that is hard to describe in words," he told *Dawn*, smiling broadly. "It is about pushing yourself to the limit, to test how far you can go. It is a unique experience."

Long-distance running is a passion shared by many in the sprawling metropolis. Some train alone in neighbourhood parks and streets, while others prefer the motivation of running in groups.

The arrival of the Karachi Marathon three years ago has given these enthusiasts both a platform and a goal.

Suriyami Wong, an Indonesian national who has lived in Karachi for 22 years, discovered her love for running in 2024 and has been training for the half marathon — her first — since last year.

"I run for mental clarity and for exercise. It's not just the run itself, but the training that goes into it — the discipline and the consistency," the 45-year-old told *Dawn*. Wong believes such events have a direct impact on the city's culture.

"This is a World Athletics-certified event, so its standards are comparable to marathons held anywhere abroad," she said. "Especially in Karachi, where people struggle to step out of their comfort zones even to walk or run, such events make a huge difference by giving people the motivation to come out."

The marathon route, however, is confined to some of the city's most affluent localities — zones largely insulated from the chaos of the old city and neighbourhoods home to middle and lower-middle-class populations.

While marathons ideally reflect the culture and character of a city, the current route passes without a single iconic heritage landmark, completely bypassing Karachi's historic core.

The organisers are conscious of this limitation.

"This is not what I can call my city," said Shoaib Nizami, the driving force behind the Karachi Marathon, speaking to *Dawn*. "This is my city," he added, as he played a promotional video on his phone showing athletes racing through Saddar and sweeping past Empress Market, Merewether Tower and Frere Hall.

"We have already had our new routes approved; it is only a matter of time before we go into the city."

Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab — whom Shoaib described as the 'custodian of the Karachi Marathon', in line with international practice — echoed these sentiments at a press conference on Thursday.

"I wish to see next year's marathon held inside the city, starting from Mazar-i-Quaid," he said. "We will take the lead — the KMC will come forward, and so will the government."

But before the Karachi Marathon makes that journey inward, thousands of runners will undertake journeys of their own — not just from Nishan-i-Pakistan Park to the DHA Golf Club, but from passion to purpose, and from anonymity to identity.

"No one knew Barcelona before the [1992] Olympics, but it came onto the world map after that," Shoaib said. "Events like the Karachi Marathon will bring our city to the world map."

Sabalenka wants 'Battle of the Sexes' rematch and revenge

BRISBANE: World number one Aryna Sabalenka on Thursday said she wants a rematch of her "Battle of the Sexes" showdown with Nick Kyrgios so she can get revenge.

Australia's Kyrgios beat the Belarusian 6-3, 6-3 in a highly-publicised showdown in Dubai last Sunday, with modified rules that divided fans.

Sabalenka's side of the court was reduced in size by nine percent in an attempt to restrict Kyrgios' power and speed advantage, while each player only received one serve.

"I think I would definitely do it again," she said ahead of the Brisbane International, her season-opening tournament as she prepares for the Australian Open on January 18. "I love revenge and I don't like to leave it the way it is."

While keen to face-off with Kyrgios again, Sabalenka said she would want a full court and two serves.

"I think for the next match we will come up with a different format," she said. "Before the match I didn't realise I would have to adjust and it was a bit tricky for me. I think I would keep the full court but I would take two serves. That would even our level a lot more.

"I always say that when you are losing, you are learning and I learned a lot about his game," she added. "I would do it again. I need revenge."

The contest bore little resemblance to the era-defining 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" encounter between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs.

Back then, there was more at stake with the nascent women's professional tour, set up by King, fighting for legitimacy and prize money for female players far lower than for the men.

King, one of the all-time greats of the women's game who was at the peak of her powers, saw off the 55-year-old Riggs, a top player in his day, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in Houston.

The Sabalenka-Kyrgios showdown faced backlash, with some calling it a "money grab" while others said it did little to advance the women's game.

But Sabalenka said she felt exhibition tennis, like the Kyrgios contest, was important.

"I think it's really important for tennis to keep it interesting, keep it fresh, keep it new, keep it fun," she said.

She added that she was proud of her part in the "Battle of the Sexes", despite Kyrgios barely playing in recent years and ranked a lowly 671.

"I am happy that I was able to challenge him, make him work and make him physically get tired and mentally get tired," she said. "I felt really excited to see a man getting tired and going for his full game. It was a really cool experience."

The Brisbane International starts on Sunday with Sabalenka's sights set on a third Australian Open title after winning in 2023 and 2024. She was beaten in the Melbourne Park final last year by Madison Keys.—AFP

Ex-boxing champ Joshua discharged from hospital after fatal car crash

LAGOS: Former world heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua has been discharged from hospital, state officials said on Wednesday, after surviving a car accident in Nigeria that killed two of his close friends.

Joshua was travelling on Monday with friends Sina Ghami and Latif Ayodele on a busy highway linking Lagos and Ibadan in the southwest of the country when their SUV rammed into a stationary truck. He suffered minor injuries, according to the Nigerian police.

Preliminary investigations showed the vehicle was moving at excessive speed and had burst a tyre before the crash, said the Traffic Compliance and Enforcement Agency (TRACE) in Ogun state, where the accident occurred.

"Anthony Joshua was discharged from hospital late this afternoon", spokesmen for Lagos and Ogun state governments said in a joint statement late Wednesday night.

"Though heavy hearted and full of emotion over the loss of his two close friends, he was deemed clinically fit to recuperate at home," Lagos state's spokesman Gbenga Omotoso and his Ogun counterpart Kayode Akinmade said.

Both state governments have been overseeing the two-time heavyweight boxing world champion's treatment since the crash on Monday.

After leaving the hospital, Joshua and his mother paid their respects at the funeral home where the bodies of his friends were "being prepared for repatriation", the statement said.

Nigerian police said the two victims died at the scene.

Ghami was Joshua's longtime strength and conditioning coach, while Ayodele was his personal trainer, according to British media.

A Nigerian newspaper, *The Guardian*, cited a senior police officer who said the driver of the car had also been discharged from hospital and was being questioned by police.

The newspaper added that the driver "could be prosecuted for reckless driving", but gave no further details.

Joshua, 36, was admitted at Lagos's Lagoon Hospital, the joint-statement said, contradicting earlier information by a TRACE official who gave the name of a different hospital.

The boxer, a British national whose family hails from southwest Nigeria, is known to visit the area when he is in the country.

Lagos, Nigeria's bustling economic capital, throngs with visitors from across the country and diaspora each December.

Photos released by the police showed the mangled wreckage of a black sports utility vehicle.

In December, Joshua knocked out YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul in a Netflix-backed bout in Miami.

The former Olympic champion Joshua has since been linked with a fight against compatriot and fellow former world champion Tyson Fury.

Joshua's last fight before the match with Paul was a fifth round knockout loss to fellow Briton Daniel Dubois in September 2024.—AFP

Chelsea part ways with manager Maresca amid poor run of form

LONDON: Chelsea parted ways with Enzo Maresca on Thursday, a dramatic fall from grace for the Italian who was named manager of the month for November before the club won just one of their last seven league games to fall out of the Premier League title race.

The Italian, who joined Chelsea in 2024 after steering Leicester City to Premier League promotion, leaves 18 months to the day since he was tasked with reviving the club's fortunes after two years of failing to qualify for the Champions League.

Maresca eventually guided the London side to Champions League qualification with a fourth-placed finish, the Conference League trophy and the Club World Cup title in his first season with a young but expensively-built squad.

But a poor run of form in December and an uncharacteristic outburst from the Italian prompted the club hierarchy to take action and part ways with the 45-year-old manager.

"Chelsea Football Club and head coach Enzo Maresca have parted company," the club said in a statement. "With key objectives still to play for across four competitions including qualification for Champions League football, Enzo and the club believe a change gives the team the best chance of getting the season back on track."

Chelsea were as high as third in November and were among the title contenders, high on confidence after they had also crushed Barcelona 3-0 in the Champions League at Stamford Bridge.

But they have since slipped to fifth in the league to sit 15 points behind leaders Arsenal at the halfway stage of the season.

Last month, Maresca voiced frustration over issues behind the scenes, saying he felt he had a lack of support from the club, describing a period after a 2-0 win over Everton as "the worst 48 hours" of his tenure.

The Italian did not clarify what he meant by the comment but the damage seemed to have been done as Chelsea's league form nosedived.

Although Chelsea beat Cardiff City to reach the League Cup semi-finals, they picked up only two points in their last three Premier League games.

Off the pitch, there was also the unwelcome distraction of rubbishing links to the Manchester City job as Maresca pointed out that he was committed to Chelsea where he had a contract until 2029.

But Tuesday's 2-2 home draw with Bournemouth — where fans chanted, "You don't know what you're doing," when he substituted playmaker Cole Palmer while they also booed at the final whistle — proved to be his final match in charge.

Maresca did not attend the post-match press conference, although his absence was attributed to illness. The draw meant Chelsea had dropped 13 points at home from winning positions this season.

The club did not say who would take charge ahead of Sunday's match against second-placed Manchester City.

Liam Rosenior — the head coach of French club Strasbourg, owned by Chelsea's parent company BlueCo, a consortium headed up by US billionaire businessman Todd Boehly — is a candidate to replace Maresca even though the Englishman is a relatively young manager at 41 and lacks Premier League experience.

Former Barcelona head coach Xavi, Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner, Fulham's Marco Silva and Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola are other potential contenders to succeed Maresca at Stamford Bridge.—Agencies